Kerala is not adequate to meet the requirements of 30,000 ex-servicemen belonging to Kollam, Pathanamthitta and part of Alleppey district; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI N.V.N. SOMU): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Kerala State-Ex-Services League has requested that a Unit Run Canteen be set up in Pathanamthitta District under the functional authority of the Station Headquaters Trivandrum. Army authorities have reported that a mobile canteen service to Pathanamthitta has already started functioning since June 1997 under the aegis of Station Headquarters, Trivandrum.

Rohtang Tunnel Project

813. SHRI VIRENDRA KATARIA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) what is the progress report of Rohtang Tunnel project undertaken by Border Road Development Board; and

(b) what are the reasons that this project is not being taken on war footing which is so important and strategic from Defence point of view and for the tourism in Himachal Pradesh and for the convenience of the people of Himachal Pradesh specially Lahul spiti?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI N.V.N. SOMU): (a) and (b) The feasibility study of constructing a tunnel at Rohtang was to be carried out in three phases. The report of phase-I was submitted by Ms RITES in 1994.

The report of phase-II was submitted by Ms RITES on 30.12.1996. Both the reports are under examination from technical angle. The environmental impact study is also underway.

Utilisation of the old bridge over Teesta River

814. SHRI DAWA LAMA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any proposal with Government to utilise the old bridge over river Teesta connecting Teesta Bazar & Kalimpong for the purpose of running small vehicles; and

(b) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI N.V.N. SOMU): (a) and (b) No, Sir. The 400 feet old Bailey Suspension Bridge (BSB) has been replaced by a 180 metre long double-lane Reinforced Cement Concrete (RCC) permanent bridge and was opened to traffic during May, 1996. The old bridge was dismantled and has been reused as per the requirement of the Army.

Purchase of Commercial Jet aircrafts

815. SHRI BHAGABAN MAJHI: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any proposal to buy commercial Jet aircrafts for country's defence purpose;

(b) if so, the number of Jet aircrafts proposed to be purchased by Government;

(c) the cost of those aircrafts; and

(d) the country from which those aircrafts are proposed to be purchased?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI N.V.N. SOMU): (a) No, Sir.

(b) to (d) Does not arise.